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Author

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THE CAMPAIGN from the WILDERNESS to PETERSBURG.

ADDRESS
OF
✓
COL. C. S. VENABLE,
(FORMERLY OF GEN. R. E. LEE'S STAFF,)

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA,

BEFORE THE

VIRGINIA DIVISION

OF THE

ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA,

At their Annual Meeting, held in the Virginia State Capitol,
at Richmond, Thursday Evening, Oct. 30th, 1873.

RICHMOND:
GEO. W. GARY, PRINTER.
1879.

ARMY NORTHERN VIRGINIA MEMORIAL VOLUME

At the last meeting of the Virginia Division Army Northern Virginia Association, I was requested, by a unanimous vote of the large number of old comrades present, to compile a volume which shall contain—

1. A carefully prepared Roster of Army of Northern Virginia.
2. The report of the great Lee Memorial Meeting in Richmond in November, 1870, with the addresses of General J. A. Early; President Jefferson Davis, Colonel C. S. Venable, of the University of Virginia; General John S. Preston, of South Carolina; General John B. Gordon, of Georgia; Colonel Charles Marshall, of Baltimore; General Henry A. Wise, of Richmond; Colonel William Preston Johnston, of Lexington, Virginia, and Colonel R. E. Withers, of Wytheville, Virginia. Also the report of the organization of the Army of Northern Virginia Association.
3. Reports of the *annual reunions* of the Virginia Division. Army of Northern Virginia, together with the addresses of Colonel C. S. Venable in 1873; Colonel Charles Marshall in 1874; Major John W. Daniel in 1875; Captain W. Gordon McCabe in 1876; Leigh Robinson, Esq., in 1877, and Colonel William Allan in 1878.

The volume will be ready in November.

Those who heard these addresses or have seen them in print will be glad to have them collected in a neat volume; and comrades of our grand old army who have been denied the privilege of mingling with us in our reunions will rejoice to have in permanent form the eulogies pronounced by our gifted President and his accomplished subalterns on the life and character of our grand old chieftain; the thrilling story of the campaign from the Rapidan to Petersburg, as graphically told by Colonel Venable, of Lee's staff; the strategic influence of Richmond on the campaigns of the Army Northern Virginia, as ably discussed by Colonel Charles Marshall, Lee's Military Secretary; the able and eloquent discussion of Gettysburg, by Major John W. Daniel, of General Early's staff; the story of the siege of Petersburg, as told in the scholarly, eloquent and valuable address of Captain W. Gordon McCabe; the vivid pictures of "the South before and at the battle of the Wilderness," by Private Leigh Robinson; and the able, exhaustive and valuable historic paper on "Jackson's Valley campaign," by Colonel William Allan, Chief of Ordnance of the Second corps.

The book will be handsomely gotten up, and will be sold for \$2, \$2.25 or \$2.50, according to binding.

As it will be published *only for subscribers*, it will be necessary to know how many copies to print.

Please send us *at once*, then, your name, how many copies you will take, and what bindings, and do me the kindness to secure some subscribers among your friends.

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Published by order of the Virginia Division of the Army of Northern
Virginia.

Gen. W. H. F. LEE, President.

GEO. L. CHRISTIAN, }
LEROY S. EDWARDS, } Secretaries.

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ADDRESS.

Comrades and Friends—Warmly appreciating the kindness and good-will of the Executive Committee in extending to me the honor of an invitation to address you on this occasion, and recognizing the duty of every Confederate soldier in Virginia to do his part in the promotion of the objects of this Association, I am here in obedience to your call. Fellow soldiers, we are not here to mourn over that which we failed to accomplish; to indulge in vain regrets of the past; to repine because, in accepting the stern arbitrament of arms, we have lost; nor merely to make vain-glorious boast of victories achieved and deeds of valor done. But we are met together as citizens of Virginia, as American freemen (a title won for us by the valor and wisdom of our forefathers), with a full sense of our responsibilities in the present and in the future which lies before us, to renew the friendships formed in that time of trial and of danger, when at the call of our grand old Mother we stood shoulder to shoulder in her defence. More than this: we are met to preserve to Virginia—to the South and to America—the true records of the valor, the constancy and heroic fortitude of the men who fought on field and flood under the banner of the Southern Cross. With this view, I have thought it not inappropriate on this occasion to give a brief outline of some facts and incidents of the campaign of the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Petersburg, which may be of some little use as a memoir to some future seeker after historic truth. I am aware that in this I am in danger of repeating much that has been told by different biographers and historians; but my desire is to give correctly some incidents of which I was an eye-witness in that wonderful campaign, and to state in brief outline some facts—accurate contemporary knowledge of which I had the opportunity of obtaining—and to present these in their proper connection with the statements of high Federal authorities. These incidents will enable us, in some measure, to appreciate that self-sacrificing devotion to duty which characterized our great leader, and will serve to show how worthy the men of that army, which he loved so well, were of his confidence and

leadership. And here let me say that no man but a craven, unworthy of the name of American freeman, whether he fought with us or against us—whether his birthplace be in the States of the South or in the States of the North—would desire to obliterate a single page or erase a single line of the fair record of their glorious deeds.

When General Lee set out from Orange Courthouse on the morning of the fourth of May to meet the Army of the Potomac, which moved at midnight of the third of May from Culpeper, he took with him Ewell's corps (diminished by General Robert Johnston's North Carolina brigade, then at Hanover Courthouse, and Hoke's North Carolina brigade of Early's division, which was in North Carolina) and Heth's and Wilcox's divisions of A. P. Hill's corps, leaving Anderson's division of Hill's corps on the Rapidan heights, with orders to follow the next day, and ordering Longstreet to follow on with his two divisions (Kershaw's and Field's) from Gordonsville. So, on May 5th, General Lee had less than twenty-six thousand infantry in hand. He resolved to throw his heads of columns on the Old turnpike road and the Plank road, and his cavalry on the Catharpin road on his right, against General Grant's troops, then marching through the Wilderness to turn our position at Orange Courthouse. This was a movement of startling boldness when we consider the tremendous odds. General Grant's forces at the beginning of the campaign have been given as more than one hundred and forty thousand of all arms, or about one hundred and twenty thousand infantry, and all of these, except Burnside's corps of twenty thousand, were across the river with him on the 5th. General Lee had less than fifty-two thousand men of all arms, or forty-two thousand infantry—fifteen thousand of which, under Longstreet and Anderson, a day's march from him, and the two North Carolina brigades, under Johnston and Hoke, which reached him, the one on the 6th of May, and the other on the 21st of May—at Spotsylvania Courthouse. And here in the beginning was revealed one great point in General Lee's bold strategy, and that was his profound confidence in the steady valor of his troops, and in their ability to maintain themselves successfully against very heavy odds—a confidence justified by his past experience and by the results of this campaign. He himself rode with General A. P. Hill at the head of his column. The advance of the enemy was met at Parker's store and soon brushed away, and the march continued to the Wilderness. Here Hill's troops came in contact with the enemy's infantry and the fight began. This battle on the Plank road was fought immediately under the eye

of the Commanding-General. The troops, inspired by his presence, maintained the unequal fight with great courage and steadiness. Once only there was some wavering, which was immediately checked. The odds were very heavy against these two divisions (Heth's and Wilcox's), which were together about ten thousand strong. The battle first began with Getty's Federal division, which was soon reinforced by the Second corps, under General Hancock. Hancock had orders, with his corps and Getty's division of the Sixth corps, to drive Hill back to Parker's store. This he tried to accomplish, but his repeated and desperate assaults were repulsed. Before night Wadsworth's division and a brigade from Warren's corps were sent to help Hancock, thus making a force of more than forty thousand men, which was hurled at these devoted ten thousand until 8 o'clock P. M. in unavailing efforts to drive them from their position.

Ewell's corps, less than sixteen thousand strong, had repulsed Warren's corps on the Old turnpike, inflicting a loss of three thousand men or more, and two pieces of artillery. Rosser, on our right, with his cavalry brigade, had driven back largely superior numbers of Wilson's cavalry division on the Catharpin road. These initial operations turned Grant's forces from the wide sweeping march which they had begun, to immediate and urgent business in the Wilderness. The army which he had set out to destroy had come up in the most daring manner and presented itself in his pathway. That General Lee's bold strategy was very unexpected to the enemy, is well illustrated by the fact recorded by Swinton, the Federal historian, that when the advance of Warren's corps struck the head of Ewell's column, on the morning of the 5th, General Meade said to those around him, "They have left a division to fool us here, while they concentrate and prepare a position on the North Anna; and what I want is to prevent these fellows from getting back to Mine Run." Mine Run was to that General doubtless a source of unpleasant reminiscences of the previous campaign. General Lee soon sent a message to Longstreet to make a night march and bring up his two divisions at daybreak on the 6th. He himself slept on the field, taking his headquarters a few hundred yards from the line of battle of the day. It was his intention to relieve Hill's two divisions with Longstreet's, and throw them farther to the left, to fill up a part of the great unoccupied interval between the Plank road and Ewell's right, near the Old turnpike, or use them on his right, as the occasion might demand. It was unfortunate that any of these troops should have become aware they were to be relieved by Longstreet. It is certain that owing to this im-

pression, Wilcox's division, on the right, was not in condition to receive Hancock's attack at early dawn on the morning of the 6th, by which they were driven back in considerable confusion. In fact some of the brigades of Wilcox's division came back in disorder, but sullenly and without panic, entirely across the Plank road, where General Lee and the gallant Hill in person helped to rally them. The assertion, made by several writers, that Hill's troops were driven back a mile and a half, is a most serious mistake. The right of his line was thrown back several hundred yards, but a portion of the troops still maintained their position. The danger, however, was great, and General Lee sent his trusted Adjutant, Colonel W. H. Taylor, back to Parker's store, to get the trains ready for a movement to the rear. He sent an aid also to hasten the march of Longstreet's divisions. These came the last mile and a half at a double quick, in parallel columns, along the Plank road. General Longstreet rode forward with that imperturbable coolness which always characterized him in times of perilous action, and began to put them in position on the right and left of the road. His men came to the front of disordered battle with a steadiness unexampled even among veterans, and with an élan which presaged restoration of our battle and certain victory. When they arrived, the bullets of the enemy on our right flank had begun to sweep the field in the rear of the artillery pits on the left of the road, where General Lee was giving directions and assisting General Hill in rallying and reforming his troops. It was here that the incident of Lee's charge with Gregg's Texas brigade occurred. The Texans cheered lustily as their line of battle, coming up in splendid style, passed by Wilcox's disordered columns, and swept across our artillery pit and its adjacent breastwork. Much moved by the greeting of these brave men and their magnificent behavior, General Lee spurred his horse through an opening in the trenches and followed close on their line as it moved rapidly forward. The men did not perceive that he was going with them until they had advanced some distance in the charge; when they did, there came from the entire line, as it rushed on, the cry, "Go back, General Lee! Go back!" Some historians like to put this in less homely words; but the brave Texans did not pick their phrases. "We won't go on unless you go back!" A sergeant seized his bridle rein. The gallant General Gregg (who laid down his life on the 9th October, almost in General Lee's presence, in a desperate charge of his brigade on the enemy's lines in the rear of Fort Harrison), turning his horse towards General Lee, remonstrated with him. Just then I called his attention to General Longstreet, whom

he had been seeking, and who sat on his horse on a knoll to the right of the Texans, directing the attack of his divisions. He yielded with evident reluctance to the entreaties of his men, and rode up to Longstreet's position. With the first opportunity I informed General Longstreet of what had just happened, and he, with affectionate bluntness, urged General Lee to go farther back. I need not say the Texans went forward in their charge and did well their duty. They were eight hundred strong, and lost half their number killed and wounded on that bloody day. The battle was soon restored, and the enemy driven back to their position of the night before. Wilcox's and Heth's divisions were placed in line, a short distance to the left of the Plank road. General Lee's immediate presence had done much to restore confidence to these brave men and to inspire the troops who came up with the determination to win at all hazards. A short time afterwards General Anderson's division arrived from Orange Courthouse. The well-known flank attack was then planned and put into execution, by which Longstreet put in, from his own and Anderson's divisions, three brigades on the right flank of the enemy, rolled it up in the usual manner, uncovering his own front, thus completely defeating Hancock's force and sending it reeling back on the Brock road. The story of this and of Longstreet's unfortunate wounding is familiar to all. His glorious success and splendid action on the field had challenged the admiration of all. As an evidence of the spirit of the men on this occasion, the Mississippi brigade of Heth's division, commanded by the gallant Colonel Stone, though the division was placed further to the left, out of the heat of battle, preferred to remain on the right, under heavy fire, and fought gallantly throughout the day under Longstreet.

When General Grant commenced his change of base and turning operation on the evening of the 7th, General Lee, with firm reliance on the ability of a small body of his troops to hold heavy odds in check until he could bring assistance, sent Anderson, who had been promoted to the command of Longstreet's two divisions, to confront his columns at Spotsylvania Courthouse. Stuart, too, threw his cavalry across Grant's line of march on the Brock road. The enemy's cavalry (division) failing to dislodge Stuart, gave up the accomplishment of that work to the Fifth corps (Warren's). When Anderson arrived at Spotsylvania Courthouse, he found the cavalry (Fitz. Lee's division), at the Courthouse, maintaining gallantly an unequal fight with the Fifth corps and Torbert's cavalry division. Torbert was checked on his right, and Stuart, with the assistance of several brigades of infantry sent to him by

Anderson, soon created in the enemy what Swinton describes as "an excited and nervous condition of mind and a tendency to stampede"—ascribed by him, however, to want of rest and Wilderness experience. Stuart stopped their advance, and they fell to entrenching of their own accord. The conduct and skill of Stuart in this fight on the 8th, on which so much depended, always met the warm approval of the Commanding-General, and he spoke of it, with grateful remembrance, in the days of March, '65, when disasters began to crowd upon us. Let us lay this laurel on the tomb of him who so soon afterwards rendered up his life leading, with heroic courage, his mere handful of wearied men against Sheridan's overwhelming numbers. That General Grant did not push up other troops to Warren's assistance to enable him to drive these two divisions (now perhaps not more than eight thousand strong) from his front, is attributable to the fact that he detained Hancock (the nearest supporting corps) to meet an anticipated attack from General Lee on his rear. That General Lee with his small force, reduced by two days' heavy fighting, should check this great body of one hundred and twenty thousand infantry (reduced by Wilderness experience), and at the same time threaten its rear and cause the Federal commander to send to Washington for reinforcements, is a thing almost unparalleled in the history of war. On General Lee's arrival with Ewell's corps in the afternoon, after a second repulse of the enemy, the line of Spotsylvania was taken up. That a part of the line was weak on Rodes' right and General Edward Johnson's salient, has often been asserted. The reason for taking it was that the road in the rear might be left free from missiles for the convenient use of the trains.

The repulse of Hancock's corps in its attempt to threaten our left and rear by General Early with Heth's division, and the terrible repulses given by Anderson's corps (Field's and Kershaw's divisions) to the repeated assaults of heavy columns, thrown against them from the Second and Fifth corps, and to the grand assault by both of these corps simultaneously at five o'clock in the afternoon, are matters of record. The odds here were seven or eight thousand men against one-half the Federal infantry. Nothing but the absolute steadiness and coolness of our men could have met and repelled these onslaughts. Our men would often call out, "Yonder they come, boys, with five lines of battle!" and after driving them back, would creep out cautiously and gather up the muskets and cartridges of the dead braves who had fallen nearest our line; so that to meet subsequent attacks, many of the men were provided each with several loaded mus-

kets. This extemporaneous substitute for breech-loaders was not to be despised when we consider the thinness of our troops in the defences, the absence of reserves, the tremendous odds of the Federal forces, and the remorseless manner with which their corps commanders sent them into these repeated assaults.

Indeed, it became pitiful to see the slaughter of these brave men in their unavailing attacks and to hear their groans as they lay dying near the Confederate line. One brave youth, a sergeant of a New York regiment, who fell shot through both knees not far from our breastworks, was for many hours an especial object of sympathy to his foes. He was seen making in his misery vain efforts at self-destruction. Repeated attempts were made by our men to bring him in, but the Federal sharpshooters were very active and rendered it impossible to get to him, and on the 11th May, when the Federal forces had withdrawn from that part of our line, there, amidst the blackened, swollen corpses of the assailants, whose sufferings had been more brief, lay this boy with the fresh, fair face of one just dead.

On the afternoon of the 10th a portion of the Sixth corps (General Sedgwick's) succeeded in piercing Rodes' line on the front, occupied by Dole's Georgia brigade. General Lee had his quarters for the day on a knoll about a hundred and fifty yards in the rear of this part of the lines and in full view of it. He at once sent an aid-de-camp to General Edward Johnson, on Rodes' right, and mounting his horse, assisted in rallying the troops and forming them for the recapture of the lines. Under his eye, Rodes' troops and Gordon's brigade, which had been brought up from the left, went forward in handsome style, recovering the lines and the battery, which, after doing much execution at short range, had fallen into the hands of the attacking force.

Swinton, blindly followed by several other writers, speaks here of the capture of nine hundred prisoners from Rodes. This is an entire mistake—the captured were very few. On the 11th General Grant withdrew from our left, and General Lee became convinced that he was going to swing round to turn our right; he, therefore, ordered the artillery on a portion of our left to be withdrawn from the immediate front so as to be ready to move at a moment's notice. On that night General Johnson, hearing the enemy massing on his front, sent a message to his corps commander (General Ewell) asking the return of his artillery. He also sent to General Gordon, commanding Early's division, asking a reinforcement of two brigades (Hays' and Pegram's), which he placed in a second line on the rear of what he considered the weakest of his defences.

The delay of the artillery and consequent disaster to Johnson's division are matters of record. The actual loss in captures was about three thousand men (his division was four thousand strong at the beginning of the campaign) and eighteen pieces of artillery, which the enemy did not get, however, for twenty hours. Johnson's message to his corps commander about the massing of the enemy in his front did not reach General Lee. He usually, in these days at Spotsylvania, left the battlefield at nine or ten o'clock in the evening for his tent, a short distance in the rear. Rising at 3 A. M. and breakfasting by candle light, he returned to the front. On the morning of the 12th, hearing the firing, he rode rapidly forward, but did not know of the disaster to Johnson's division until he reached the front. Before he arrived, Brigadier-General Gordon, commanding Early's division, in obedience to orders previously given by General Lee to support any portion of the line about the salient which might be attacked, hearing the firing about daylight, had moved forward towards the salient with his division. Moving in column in the dim light, with General Robert Johnston's North Carolina brigade in front, he came in contact with Hancock's line advancing through the woods, it having overrun General Edward Johnson's division, capturing his lines and a large number of his men. The enemy's line thus moving on stretched across our works on both their flanks, thus taking our men in the trenches on both sides the captured angle completely in flank. They fired on Gordon's advancing column, severely wounding General Robert Johnston and causing some confusion among the men. It was still not light—the woods dense, and the morning rainy. A line of troops could not be seen a hundred yards off. It was a critical moment. Gordon halted his column, and with that splendid audacity which characterized him, deployed a brigade as skirmishers—extending, as he supposed, across the whole Federal front—and ordered a charge by this line of skirmishers. This charge caused that part of the Federal troops whose front they covered to hesitate long enough to enable him to get his troops into line; but the Federal line on Gordon's right still pressed on, threatening his right-rear and the right flank of Hill's corps (commanded by General Early) in the trenches. They were here checked by General Lane's North Carolina brigade, who, throwing his left flank back from the trenches, confronted their advance.

Gordon soon arranged the left of his division to make an effort to recapture the lines by driving the enemy back with his right. As he was about to move forward with his Georgia and Virginia brigades in the charge, General Lee, who had reached the front

a few minutes before, rode up and joined him. Seeing that Lee was about to ride with him in the charge, the scene of the 6th of May was repeated. Gordon pointed to his Georgians and Virginians, who had never failed him, and urged him to go to the rear. This incident has passed into history, and I will not repeat the details here. Suffice it to say Lee yielded to his brave men, accepting their promise to drive the enemy back. Gordon, carrying the colors, led them forward in a headlong, resistless charge, which carried every thing before it, recapturing the trenches on the right of the salient, and a portion of those on the left, recovering some of the lost guns and leaving the rest of them on disputed ground between our troops and the portion of the line still held by the enemy. As Hancock's left and centre were thus checked by Gordon's audacious line of skirmishers and Lane's disposition of his brigade on Hill's left, and finally hurled back by this splendid charge of Gordon's brigades, so his right was met by Ramseur's North Carolina brigade, of General Rodes' division, who attacked and pressed it steadily back towards the angle. Rodes bringing up the rest of his division to Ramseur's assistance, Hancock was thrown completely back on that portion of the captured line to the left of the salient, and here, in this narrow space, was waged the tremendous combat throughout the entire day. In the space between the contending lines lay fourteen of the eighteen pieces of artillery, swept over by the Federals as they leaped into the salient in the early morning, before they were even unlimbered—neither party being able to take possession of them. What was left of Johnson's division had been immediately attached to Gordon's command, and at an early hour a portion of Gordon's men were set to work to make a strong entrenched line, about three hundred yards in rear of the captured salient, in order thus to render its occupation of no advantage to the foe.

The Sixth corps was sent by General Grant about 6 A. M. to reinforce Hancock, and somewhat later he sent two divisions of Warren's corps. General Lee sent to the assistance of General Rodes, on whose front the confined battle raged, three brigades during the day—McGowan's South Carolina brigade, Perrin's Alabama brigade and Harris' brigade of Mississippians. Now, Rodes' division at the beginning of the campaign was about six thousand five hundred muskets, and it had already done some heavy fighting in the Wilderness and on the Spotsylvania lines. The brigades sent to his assistance did not number twenty-five hundred men. So that Rodes, with less than ten thousand men, kept back for eighteen hours more than one-half of General

Grant's infantry, supported by a heavy fire of Federal artillery. There was one continuous roll of musketry from dawn till midnight. The Spotsylvania tree cut down by bullets was a proof, not only of the closeness of the contestants, but of the narrow space to which the battle was confined. During the day there was a second repetition of the occurrence of the 6th May. General Lee had his position nearly all day near a point on Heth's line to the left of Spotsylvania Courthouse. Rodes sent to him asking for reinforcements. He sent me to the right of the line to guide Harris' brigade of Mississippians from the right of our line down to Rodes. The brigade, in coming across from the right, passed near General Lee's position. He rode out from a little copse alone and placed himself by General Harris' side at the head of his column. Soon the troops came under the artillery fire of the enemy. General Lee's horse reared under the fire, and a round shot passed under him very near the rider's stirrup. The men halted and shouted to him to go back, and, in fact, refused to move if he marched with them. He told them he would go back if they would only promise him to retake the lines. The men shouted, in response, "We will! We will, General Lee!" He then repeated the order to me to guide them down to General Rodes, and rode slowly away towards Heth's lines. The Mississippians marched on with steady step to the front—"Into the mouth of hell, marched the eight hundred;" theirs but to do and die, for they had promised Lee. They cheered lustily the gallant Rodes, as they passed into the deadly fray. Coming in at a time when Ramseur was heavily pressed, the day was saved. This was the last reinforcement sent in. The lines were not retaken, but the enemy was pressed back into the narrow angle and held there on the defensive until midnight. The homely simplicity of General Lee in these scenes of the 6th and 12th of May, is in striking contrast with the theatrical tone of the famous order of Napoleon at Austerlitz, in which he said: "Soldiers, I will keep myself at a distance from the fire, if with your accustomed valor you carry disorder and confusion into the enemy's ranks; but if victory appear uncertain, you will see your Emperor expose himself in the front of battle." It is the contrast of the simple devotion to duty of the Christian patriot, thoughtless of self, fighting for all that men held dear, with the selfish spirit of the soldier of fortune, "himself the only god of his idolatry."

I have been thus particular in giving this incident, because it has been by various writers of the life of Lee confounded with the other two incidents of a like character which I have before given. In fact, to our great Commander, "so low in his opinion

of himself and so sublime in all his actions," these were matters of small moment; and when written to by a friend in Maryland (Judge Mason), after the war, as to whether such an incident ever occurred, replied, briefly, "Yes; General Gordon was the General"—alluding thus concisely to the incident of the early morning of the 12th, when General Gordon led the charge, passing over the similar occurrences entirely, in his characteristic manner of never speaking of himself when he could help it. But that which was a small matter to him was a great one to the men whom he thus led.

At nightfall our line of battle still covered four of the eighteen contested guns. The interior line was finished later, and our wearied heroes were withdrawn to it about midnight. Unfortunately, the four recaptured pieces, through the darkness of the night and difficulty of the ground, became bogged in a swamp while being brought off, and so were left outside of the new lines and fell again into the hands of the enemy.

During the day, the enemy, under the impression that General Lee had weakened his lines to reinforce our troops in Hancock's front, made an attack, which was repulsed with heavy loss to the attacking column. The repulse of this attack of Burnside on Wilcox's front, the splendid execution done by the artillery of Heth's line on the flank of the attacking party, and the counter attacks by brigades of Hill's corps, sent out in front of our lines during the day, have been recorded by the graphic pen of General Early, who had been assigned to the command on account of General Hill's sickness on the 7th of May.* The restoration of the battle on the 12th, thus rendering utterly futile the success achieved by Hancock's corps at daybreak, was a wonderful feat of arms, in which all the troops engaged deserve the greatest credit for endurance, constancy and unflinching courage; but without unjust discrimination, we may say that Gordon, Rodes and Ramseur were the heroes of this bloody day. General Lee recommended Gordon to be made Major-General of date 12th May. Rodes and Ramseur were destined alas! in a few short months, to lay down their noble lives in the Valley of Virginia. There was no victor's chaplet more highly prized by the Roman soldier than that woven of the grass of early spring. Then let the earliest flowers of May always be intertwined in the garlands which the pious hands of our fair women shall lay on the tombs of Rodes and Ramseur and of the gallant dead of the battle of twenty hours at Spotsylvania.†

* General Hill, though unable to sit up, in these days of Spotsylvania, would have himself drawn up in his ambulance immediately in rear of the lines. Such was his anxiety to be near his troops.

† The question has been asked since the war why General Lee sent no telegram to Richmond concerning this battle of May 12th. He did send such a telegram to the War Department. Of its further history I know nothing.

The captured angle, now useless to the enemy, was abandoned by them on the 14th. The attacks made on our lines by General Grant on the 14th and 18th were very easily repulsed. On the afternoon of the 19th, General Lee sent Ewell with his corps to the north side of the narrow Ni river to attack the Federal trains and threaten Grant's line of communication with Fredericksburg. After Ewell crossed and was already engaged with Tyler's division of the enemy, guarding the trains, General Lee became aware for the first time that on account of the difficulties of the way through the flats on the river, he had not taken his artillery with him. He was rendered uneasy by this, and sent orders to General Early to extend his left so as to close up, as far as practicable, the gap between his corps and General Ewell's. Fortunately, General Hampton, who accompanied Ewell with his cavalry brigade, carried with him a battery of horse artillery, and did good service in relieving the difficulties of General Ewell's situation. In this movement some execution was done on some of Grant's newly arrived reinforcements before they were reinforced by troops from the Second and Fifth corps. General Ewell withdrew to the south side of the Ni without much loss. This affair delayed the contemplated turning movement of the Federal army for twenty-four hours.

On the night of the 20th of May, having discovered, after twelve days of hopeless effort, that Lee's position could not be carried, General Grant began his movement to the North Anna. General Lee had received no reinforcements since the beginning of the campaign, except the two absent brigades of Ewell's corps, mentioned before. He telegraphed to General Breckinridge, after the victory of the latter over Siegel at New Market on May 16th, to come to him with his division, and Pickett's division was moving to him from North Carolina and Petersburg.

Grant left his dead unburied in large numbers both at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Courthouse, and many thousand muskets scattered through the woods. The Confederates being in possession of these battlefields, the Ordnance officers were instructed to collect the materials of war left thereon. Among other things, they obtained more than one hundred and twenty-two thousand pounds of lead in bullets, which were recast in Richmond and fired again at the enemy before the close of the campaign.

The head of Pickett's division reached the army as we began the march to the Northanna, and Breckinridge's division from the Valley, about two thousand seven hundred strong, was added to the Army of Northern Virginia at Hanover junction on the 24th of May.

When General Grant's troops, on the morning of May 23d,

reached the north bank of the North Anna, he found the Army of Northern Virginia in position on the south side. Not much force was wasted in preventing the crossing of the Federal forces. Warren's corps crossed on our left at Jericho ford, without opposition, and Hancock soon overcame the few men left in the old earthworks at the bridge. Once on the south side it was another matter. General Grant found General Lee's centre near the river; his right reposed on the swamps and his left thrown back obliquely towards the Little river behind him. He discovered, at a heavy cost of life, that in this position he could make no progress in attempting to force it. In fact one onslaught on our right was repulsed by merely doubling the line of skirmishers in front of the division (Rodes') attacked. The Federal commander says, in his report: "Finding the enemy's position on the North Anna stronger than either of his previous ones, I withdrew on the night of the 26th to the north bank of the North Anna." Says the chronicler of the Army of the Potomac: "The annals of war seldom present a more effective checkmate than was thus given by Lee."

But it would be a mistake, in estimating General Lee as a soldier, to assume that it was his rôle to permit General Grant to move around his flank at will, and then to content himself by our interior and shorter lines, to throw himself across his path once more. He was constantly seeking an opportunity to attack the Federal army, now dispirited by the bloody repulses of the repeated attacks on our lines, so obstinately persisted in by General Grant. He hoped to strike the blow at the North Anna or between the Annas and the Chickahominy. He hoped much from an attack on Warren's corps, which, having crossed at Jericho ford, several miles higher up the North Anna, lay in a hazardous position, separated from the rest of the Federal army. General Hill, who was now sufficiently recovered to be in the saddle, at the head of his corps, was also sanguine of success in this attack; but the main plan miscarried through some mishap, though one or two minor successes on this our left flank—notably one by General Mahone's division—were effected.

But, alas! in the midst of these operations on the North Anna, General Lee was taken sick and confined to his tent. As he lay prostrated by his sickness, he would often repeat: "We must strike them a blow; we must never let them pass us again—we must strike them a blow." But though he still had reports of the operations in the field constantly brought to him, and gave orders to his officers, Lee confined to his tent was not Lee on the battlefield.

I know it is unprofitable now to consider what might have

happened, but I cannot refrain from venturing to express the opinion, that had not General Lee been physically disabled, he would have inflicted a heavy blow on the enemy in his march from the Pamunkey to the Chickahominy. An officer, whose opinions are entitled to much consideration, has often expressed the opinion that the opportunity was offered for this blow near Haw's shop, where the Confederate cavalry, under Hampton and Fitz. Lee, met General Sheridan, sustained heavily by the Federal infantry. However that may be, Grant found Lee always in his front whenever and wherever he turned. After some desultory but sharp fighting on the Totopotomoy, he found his old adversary in position at Cold Harbor*—a place, the reminiscences of which were more inspiring to the Confederate than to the Federal troops.

General Grant, as soon as he crossed the Pamunkey, made arrangements to draw troops to him from Butler, who was lying in compulsory leisure in his "Bermuda bottle." His reinforcements received before the arrival of those can be fairly estimated at more than fifty thousand men. These came to him by Acquia creek, Port Royal and the White House on York river, and including these four divisions drawn from the Tenth and Eighteenth corps, Northern authorities put Grant's effectives from the beginning of the campaign up to the days of the Chickahominy conflict, at more than two hundred and twenty thousand men of all arms. In addition to the troops already mentioned, General Lee drew to himself Hoke's division of Beauregard's army at Petersburg, and was reinforced by Finnegan's Florida brigade and Keitt's South Carolina regiment. These bodies, amounting to between seven and eight thousand men, came to him on the Chickahominy. Our cavalry was also reinforced during the latter days in May by two regiments from South Carolina and a battalion from Georgia.

The victory of the third of June, at Cold Harbor was perhaps the easiest ever granted to Confederate arms by the folly of Federal commanders. It was a general assault along a front of six miles and a bloody repulse at all points, and a partial success at one weak salient, speedily crushed by Finnegan's Floridians and the Maryland battalion. The loss on the Federal side was conceded to be about thirteen thousand; on our side it was about twelve hundred. When a renewal of the attack was ordered by General Grant in the forenoon, most of his troops refused to move, and says Swinton: "His immobile lines pronounced a silent

*It may be worth noting that this Cold Harbor, now made famous by two great battles, is the old English name for an ordinary or tavern, where the traveler could get lodging without food. One of the sets of apartments in the town of London is called "Cold Harbor."

yet emphatic verdict against further slaughter." On the 4th of June we had a renewal of the painful scenes of Spotsylvania, with the dead and the dying assailants lying in front of our lines. On the 5th of June, General Grant asked permission to bury his dead. By that time his wounded, who had lain so long under the summer's sun, were now counted with the dying, and the dying with the dead. General Grant lay in his lines until the night of the 12th of June. The notice here of his "resolution to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer" seeming now "to be sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought." On that day Sheridan was defeated by Hampton, whose force consisted of his own and Fitz. Lee's divisions, at Trevillian's depot. The main object of Sheridan's march towards Gordonsville was to make a junction with Hunter's and Crook's united corps, and bring it down to Grant's army. This operation being rendered impossible by Sheridan's defeat, on the night of the 12th of June, the Federal army began its march to the south side of the James. General Grant had at first been of the opinion that the south side of the James was the best position for attack, and doubtless his north side experience had made this opinion a positive conviction. Says his chronicler: "The march of fifty-five miles across the peninsula was made in two days, and with perfect success." Surely after so much unsuccessful fighting, the Federal commander is entitled to all praise for this successful marching.

The overland campaign was at an end. To the Federal army it had been a campaign of bloody repulses, and even when a gleam of success seemed to dawn upon it for a moment (as at the Plank road on May 6th and at Spotsylvania on the morning of the 12th), it was speedily extinguished in blood, and immediate disaster covered over the face of their rising star of victory. Says the historian of the Army of the Potomac: "So gloomy was the military outlook after the action of the Chickahominy, that there was at this time great danger of the collapse of the war. The history of this conflict, truthfully written, will show this. Had not success elsewhere come to brighten the horizon, it would have been difficult to have raised new forces to recruit the Army of the Potomac, which, shaken in its structure, its valor quenched in blood and thousands of its ablest officers killed and wounded, was the Army of the Potomac no more." In a foot note to this he adds: "The archives of the State Department, when one day made public, will show how deeply the Government was affected by the want of military success, and to what resolutions the Executive had in consequence come."

That the morale of General Lee's army was high at this time there can be no doubt. The strain of continuous bloody fight-

ing at Spotsylvania had been great; but the campaigns of the North Anna and Chickahominy had given them much more repose. They were conscious of the success of the campaign, and were on better rations than they had been for a long time. The fat bacon and (Weathersfield?) onions brought in at that time from Nassau were very cheering to the flesh, and the almost prodigal charity with which several brigades contributed their rations to the suffering poor of Richmond was a striking incident in the story of these days on the Chickahominy. But cheerful and in high spirits though they were, there was a sombre tinge to the soldier wit in our thinned ranks which expressed itself in the homely phrase, "What is the used of killing these Yankees? it is like killing mosquitoes—two come for every one you kill."

As General Lee had sent Breckinridge back towards the Valley on June 8th and General Early, with the Second corps (now numbering about eight thousand muskets—it having suffered more than either of the other corps), on the 12th to meet Hunter at Lynchburg, and restored Hoke's division to General Beauregard at Petersburg, the odds against him were much increased, as he had now with him only from twenty-five to twenty-seven thousand infantry.

These bold movements show what he thought of the condition of the Federal army and his undiminished confidence in the morale of his own troops.

When Grant reached the James in safety, after his successful march, he did not repose under the shadow of his gunboats, as did the sorely bruised McClellan in 1862. Being essentially a man of action and obstinate persistency—and, more than all, having the advantage of McClellan in the consciousness that his Government had staked all on him and would support him with all its resources—he crossed the James and pushed on to Petersburg. He attacked Beauregard on the Petersburg lines on the 15th with Smith's corps, sent in transports from the White House. Reinforcing Smith heavily, he attacked him again on the 16th, and pushed corps after corps to the front. On the 17th Beauregard had all Grant's army to deal with. Fighting against overwhelming numbers, he had exacted a bloody tribute for every foot gained by the enemy. Though Grant met with partial success in carrying the outer lines, held by a mere handful of troops, yet Beauregard's small force, strengthened by his brigades withdrawn from the Bermuda Hundred lines and by the return of Hoke's division from Cold Harbor, held him in check at the interior lines until General Lee's arrival, with reinforcements, on the 18th of June.

General Lee remained on the north side of the James until

June 15th. On the night of that day he camped near Drewry's Bluff. On the 16th and 17th of June, he superintended personally the recapture of the Bermuda Hundred lines by Field's and Pickett's divisions. These lines had been occupied by Butler after the withdrawal of Beauregard's troops for the defence of Petersburg on the day before. The incident of the volunteer attack of our men on these lines, various incorrect versions of which have been given, happened thus: By the afternoon of the 17th all of the line had been retaken except a portion in front of the Clay house. The order had been given to Generals Field and Pickett to move against them from the lines which they held. But meantime the engineers reported that the line already taken up by our troops was of sufficient strength, and that it would be an unnecessary waste of life to attack the part still held by the enemy. The orders to make the attack were countermanded by General Lee. This countermanding order reached General Field in time, but did not reach General Pickett until his troops were already involved in the attack under his orders. General Pickett sent a message to General Gregg, of the Texas brigade, of Field's division, which was next to his right, urging him to go in and protect his flank. Gregg consented at once, but could not wisely move until he had sent a like message to the troops on his right, as the interval between the line held by our troops and that held by the enemy widened much from left to right in front of Field's division. At this moment, however, Pickett's advancing lines opened fire, and in an instant the men of the brigades of Field's division, on General Gregg's right (first squads of men and officers, then the standards, and then whole regiments), leaped over our entrenchments and started in the charge without orders, and General Gregg and his Texans rushed forward with them, and in a few moments the line was ours. It was a gallant sight to see; and a striking evidence of the high spirit and splendid élan of troops who had now been fighting more than forty days, in one continuous strain of bloody battles. It was a hazardous movement, as the position attacked was a very strong one; but it was found to be held by a mere handful of the enemy, and our loss was very slight. I have been thus particular in the details of this incident, of which I was an eye-witness, as General Lee, who was at the Clay house, was not acquainted with all the facts when he sent the well-known message to General Anderson, mentioning only Pickett's men.

On the next day, June 18th, General Lee marched to Petersburg with the van of his army, Kershaw's division, with which he at once reinforced Beauregard's troops in the line of defence. Both Generals were on the field that day, when the assault along

the whole line was made by the Federal corps, which met with such a complete and bloody repulse. During the action a young artillery officer fell by General Lee's side, shot through the body. The attack made no impression whatever on our lines. The easy repulse of the Federal corps on this occasion, and the result of the attack made by Hill with a part of Wilcox's and Mahone's divisions on the Second and Sixth corps, near the Jerusalem plank-road, on the 21st, when sixteen hundred prisoners and four pieces of artillery were captured by Mahone, made it plain that the opportunity had arrived for a decisive blow. So on the night of the 22d, General Lee sent for General Alexander, the accomplished Chief of Artillery of Longstreet's corps, and made arrangements for the disposition of the artillery for an attack on the morning of the 24th. The attack was to begin at daylight, with a heavy fire of artillery from Archer's hill, on the north bank of the Appomattox, enfilading the enemy's line near the river; then the infantry of Hoke's division, sustained by Field's division, was to begin with the capture of the line next the river, and then sweep along the line uncovering our front, thus rolling up the Federal right, and compelling General Grant to battle in the open field at a disadvantage. At daybreak on the 24th the artillery opened fire and did its work well. The skirmishers of Hagood's brigade of Hoke's division went forward very handsomely and captured the lines next the river. But through some mistake this success was not followed up—the gallant skirmishers were not sustained, and were soon made prisoners by the forces of the enemy turned against them. And thus the whole plan, so well conceived and so successful in its beginning, was given up much to the sorrow of the Commanding-General.

In the preliminary operations about Petersburg up to July 1st, Grant's losses footed up fifteen thousand men. On the 6th of July, his engineers pronounced the Confederate works impregnable to assault. From this date the operations partook of the nature of a siege.

As it is not my intention to give any record of events after the siege of Petersburg, I will close my address at this point in the campaign of '64—a campaign, the full history of which would leave the world in doubt, whether most to admire the genius of our great leader or the discipline, devotion, courage and constancy of his soldiers.

On the 4th of May four converging invading columns set out simultaneously for the conquest of Virginia. The old State, which had for three years known little else save the tramp of armed legions, was now to be closed in by a circle of fire, from mountains to the seaboard.

Through the Southwestern mountain passes, through the gates of the lower valley, from the battle-scarred vales of the Rappahannock, from the Atlantic seaboard, by the waters of the James, came the serried hosts on field and flood, numbering more than two hundred and seventy-five thousand men (including in this number also reinforcements sent during the campaign). No troops were ever more thoroughly equipped or supplied with a more abundant commissariat. For the heaviest column, transports were ready to bring supplies and reinforcements to any one of three convenient deep-water bases—Acquia creek, Port Royal and the White House.

The column next in importance had its deep-water base within nine miles of a vital point in our defences. In the cavalry arm (so important in a campaign in a country like ours) they boasted overwhelming strength.

The Confederate forces in Virginia, and those which could be drawn to its defence from other points, numbered not more than seventy-five thousand men. Yet our great Commander, with steadfast heart, committing our cause to the God of battles, calmly made his dispositions to meet the shock of the invading hosts. In sixty days the great invasion had dwindled to a siege of Petersburg (nine miles from deep-water) by the main column, which, "shaken in its structure, its valor quenched in blood, and thousands of its ablest officers killed or wounded, was the army of the Potomac no more."

Mingled with it in the lines of Petersburg lay the men of the second column, which, for the last forty days of the campaign, had been held in inglorious inaction at Bermuda Hundreds by Beauregard, except when a portion of it was sent to share the defeat of June 3d on the Chickahominy; while the third and fourth columns, foiled at Lynchburg, were wandering in disorderly retreat through the mountains of West Virginia, entirely out of the area of military operations. Lee had made his works at Petersburg impregnable to assault, and had a movable column of his army within two days' march of the Federal capital. He had made a campaign unexampled in the history of defensive warfare.

My comrades, I feel that I have given but a feeble picture of this grand period in the history of the time of trial of our beloved South—a history which is a great gift of God, and which we must hand down as a holy heritage to our children, not to teach them to cherish a spirit of bitterness or a love for war, but to show them that their fathers bore themselves worthily in the strife when to do battle became a sacred duty. Heroic history is the living soul of a nation's renown. When the traveler in

Switzerland reads on the monument near Bâsle the epitaph of the thirteen hundred brave mountaineers who met the overwhelming hosts of their proud invaders, and "fell, not conquered, but wearied with victory, giving their souls to God and their bodies to the enemy"; or when he visits the places sacred to the myth of William Tell, transplanted by pious, patriotic fraud from the legends of another people to inspire the youth of that mountain-land with the hatred of tyrants and the love of heroic deeds; or when he contemplates that wonderful monument by Thorwaldsen, on the shores of Lake Lucerne, in commemoration of the fidelity in death of the Swiss Guard of Louis XVI—a colossal lion, cut out of the living rock, pierced by a javelin, and yet in death protecting the lily of France with his paw,—he asks himself, how many men of the nations of the world have been inspired with a love of freedom by the monuments and heroic stories of little Switzerland?

Comrades, we need not weave any fable borrowed from Scandinavian lore into the woof of our history to inspire our youth with admiration of glorious deeds in freedom's battles done. In the true history of this Army of Northern Virginia, which laid down its arms "not conquered, but wearied with victory," you have a record of deeds of valor, of unselfish consecration to duty, and faithfulness in death, which will teach our sons and our son's sons how to die for liberty. Let us see to it that it shall be transmitted to them.



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